DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 258 UD 027 558

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TITLE University, School and Community: Uniting for Urban Literacy.
PUB DATE 24 Feb 90
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Chicago, IL, February 24, 1990). Figure 2, illustrating the program model, is missing.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Community Cooperation; Cooperative Programs; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; *Parent Participation; Program Descriptions; Rural Areas; *School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; *Tutoring; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Collaboratives

ABSTRACT

The Urban Curriculum Partnership is a collaborative among a rural university and an urban school district and the community it serves. The goal is to help at-risk students reach their academic potential, stay in school, and eventually enter into a postsecondary education program. A district-wide tutoring program was developed and implemented in conjunction with the existing academic program. Each group in the collaborative benefited from the relationship. The university was able to provide an early, multicultural inservice field experience for its largely rural preservice teachers and develop a larger pool of potential minority group teachers. The community was able to establish a parent-operated homework/tutoring program, obtain speakers and role models, and permit parents to express concerns to teachers and administrators. The school district received a curriculum specifically designed for at-risk students, full-time coordinators to supervise the university student tutors and coordinate the program, and technical assistance from university faculty. The following problem areas were reported by the project director: (1) lack of adequate communication between the university students and the director; (2) finding new ways of communicating with minority group parents; (3) recruiting and training parent tutors; (4) getting all groups to work together; (5) keeping lines of communication open; (6) transportation for university students to school sites; (7) time and energy needed to work with all groups; (8) time and resources needed to collect and analyze statistical data; (9) negative attitudes of some university faculty towards community outreach; and (10) funding. A chart illustrating the benefits derived by participants is included. A list of 17 references is appended. (FMW)

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UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: UNITING FOR URBAN LITERACY

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ED322258

A paper presented at AACTE National Conference in Chicago on February 24, 1990.

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a partnership between an urban school district, community and a university located in a rural area (of western Pennsylvania). A district-wide tutoring program has been implemented, using university teacher education majors, to help increase reading scores, overall grades and attitudes of "At Risk" students in the urban school district. The long term goal is to provide programs that will prepare "At Risk" students to succeed in school and enter postsecondary education programs. In addition, the university students receive a valuable multicultural experience which will help prepare them to teach a diverse student population effectively.

UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: UNITING FOR URBAN LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

Public elementary and secondary education in the United States is at a crossroads. The success of educators' efforts to improve schooling during the remaining years of this century will have a profound influence on this nation's role as a leader of the free world; education will influence the quality of life for Americans in the twenty-first century. Never before has the success of this nation and its people been linked so inextricably to the quality of education available to young people in the nation's elementary and secondary schools (Sergiovanni & Moore, 1989).

The educational reform movement currently underway grew out of a national debate related to the quality of public education. There has been a growing concern in recent years that American schools are simply not equipped to provide the quality of education young people will need for living productive lives during the next century.

Partnerships aimed at raising academic performance, strengthening teacher education programs, and increasing parent/community involvement are among the fastest growing reform efforts going on today. There is an increasing acknowledgement that long-term school reform must involve all those with a vested interest in the education of our youth. As two researchers concluded, "schools, if they are to improve or be improved, must somehow be connected to new knowledge from the outside" (Tye & Tye, 1984, p. 319).

In response to local initiative as well as recent publicity about collaborative school reforms, universities and public schools have entered

into numerous partnerships for school reform. During 1983-84, more than 15,000 schools were engaged in voluntary partnerships with some 46,000 outside sponsors (Jones & Maloy, 1988).

Many reform efforts have fallen short of their intended expectations because they have effected only part of our complex educational system. School improvement must involve interaction among all parties who affect the educational environment. Can partnerships between schools and outside organizations support activities among diverse individuals that allow time to learn new perspectives and approaches, to share activities and understandings, and to reconsider organizational strategies and structures? The answer is yes- if collaboration empowers educators as professionals to interact with outsiders to renew a sense of educational purpose.

This article will focus on how partnership participants mutually benefit from each other; and also describe a partnership between an urban school district, a community and a university located in a rural area of western Pennsylvania.

ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP: SATISFYING MUTUAL NEEDS

(Improving Teacher Education)

Teacher educators are increasingly under pressure, to provide programs that provide a better quality of teachers; and also to attract more minority students into these programs. The trend in higher education today is to "take-charge" of the growing crisis situation of the decreasing number of minority students who are entering into postsecondary education programs. Why should universities and educators be concerned? By the year 2000, one out of every three elementary and secondary students in the U.S. will be of an ethnic minority group yet, in 1988, only 8% of the K-12

teaching force were minorities and it is projected that minorities may compose as little as 5% of the teaching force by 1990 (NEA, 1987). In addition to the low number of minority teachers who will be available to teach the increased number of minority students, many of the preservice teachers in teacher education programs are raised in all-white neighborhoods and do not have the opportunity to participate in multicultural activities or to be involved with minority groups. This fact alone stresses the need to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with minority students. Stereotypical myths can then be dispelled by direct involvement with minority students.

Forming collaborations with urban schools is a way for universities to strengthen their teacher education programs by providing preservice teachers with a valuable multicultural experience. At the same time, the collaboration can provide a way to identify, develop and implement programs that will help "At Risk" students raise achievement scores, stay in school and ultimately enter a postsecondary education program that will enable them to participate in a diverse society. The hope is that some of the students reached in such partnerships may become part of the pool of minority teachers available for the next generation.

(Improving Parent/Community Participation in School Reform)

According to many opinion polls, parents and teachers generally believe that both would benefit from greater interactions. More than a million parents participate in advisory councils (Davies, 1978, p.81).

Most schools encourage parent-teacher conferences, yet those relationships often frustrate both sides because they hold different purposes. Teachers believe that parents should prepare children for the school day, reinforce

the importance of homework, and accept responsibility for socialization skills. Many parents seek influence over curriculum, disciplinary procedures, and staff evaluations primarily for their own children.

Schools, parents and community members are "worlds apart"; as Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1978) observed, "families and schools are engaged in a complementary sociocultural task and yet they find themselves in great conflict with one another" (p. 20). Schools seldom provide opportunities for debating and resolving parent and community conflicts with teachers and schools.

Teachers and parents have power by virtue of their positions. Parents can be "trapped" for their children. Since collaborations rely primarily on volunteer support, it is crucial to develop leadership qualities in volunteer parents and community members who are part of the partnership. There are significant management and leadership strategies for motivating and organizing volunteer community members. Can community members be trained to serve as valuable contributors and participants in school improvement programs? If parents participate in school improvement programs, school/community relationships are likely to be strengthened.

TAKING CHARGE: A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN CURRICULUM PARTNERSHIP

This is the description of a collaboration project between an urban school district and a university located in a small rural town in western Pennsylvania. The school district has a large number of "At Risk" students (over 48%) and the university has a majority of white students (98%) enrolled in their teacher education program. "At Risk" students are defined as those students who are socially, economically and academically depressed

and are the most likely to drop out of school and become non-contributing members of a community.

(The Project Participants)

The University is one of 14 state owned universities in the state and is located in a small rural community. There are approximately 7,300 students in attendance. Sixty percent of the 90% white student body is predominately from the rural western Pennsylvania region in which the school is located.

The school district has a total of 4,019 students and 240 teachers, constitute the makeup of the teaching staff across the district. The student body is 40% minority students, with Blacks making up the majority of that group. Less than 4% of the teaching staff are of minority background. The following schools are involved in the partnership:

4 Primary Centers

1 Intermediate School (grades 4-6)

1 Junior High School (grades 7-8)

1 Senior High School (grades 9-12)

1 Vocational-technical High School (9-12)

(The Need For The Partnership)

As a result of the declining number of unskilled labor jobs available in the county where this district is located, students will need to enroll in postsecondary education programs instead of immediately entering the job market. There is also a large percentage of disadvantaged, low-income students in this district. Minority/disadvantaged students in the target area face many problems and limitations. Many live in housing projects where

frequent drug raids continue to occur since the first major raid in October, 1986. There are few Black role models in the schools. These "At Risk" students have no way of experiencing an alternative lifestyle outside of the projects and their schools. Often teacher expectations for these students are low and they are referred to as the "hard core" kids of the district. Fewer than 20% of all the minority students enrolled in the district apply to any postsecondary education program. The rest either graduate or drop out and end up as non-productive members of the community. Teen pregnancy is also high among this group.

An additional problem is the lack of parental involvement in educational activities. Parents who are struggling to support their families on a reduced income are less likely to provide needed educational support and guidance to their children. This fact, coupled with the fact the parent of "At Risk students are often not greeted in the same manner as other parents in the schools by teacher and administrators has lowered these parents active involvement in their children's education. The over-all attitude of teacher and administrators is that "those people only come when they want to raise hell with the teachers".

(Laying The Foundation: Initiating the Partnership)

The partnership was initiated by a Black community group who felt that the Black students in the district were not getting a fair chance for a quality education. The district has recently decided to go back to the "neighbor school" system and as result, the majority of the minority students now attend what has become a resegregated primary center. Since 80% of the Black population lives on this side of the city, most of the students who live in this area are also identified as "At Risk". Thus, one

major concern is that at a crucial time in their early education, these students are being exposed to the same environment and low expectations in which they live. Another concern is that the majority of teachers in the district are white, with little or no knowledge of Black history, Black culture or any direct experiences with Black children. There is no Black studies in the curriculum and based on an informal survey, most of the Black students are embarrassed when any Black person in discussed in their classes. These issues became the focus of a meeting with the superintendent of schools, concerned members of the Black community and two representatives of the university faculty/staff.

From that meeting evolved a roundtable dinner discussion meeting with larger representation. Representatives from groups with a vested interest in "At Risk" youth were invited to come together to generate some common concerns/needs and possible solutions for these needs. The groups included representatives from the community, the school district and the university (i.e. NAACP, Human Relations, Ministerial Alliance, school board members, teachers, administrators, teachers' union president, university dean and selected faculty). The belief was that people will more readily support something in which they are included initially. The people who could bring about the desired change were in these groups.

An interesting thing happened at the first roundtable meeting: all groups expressed the same concerns/needs! For the first time, these groups were listening to each other and the barriers of mistrust and defensive posturing began to fall. There has been a lack of communication; the community and school district have formed their own misguided assumptions about each other. The university representative helped the groups decide on mutual needs and solutions by acting as a facilitator and

mediator. At follow-up planning meeting and another roundtable dinner, representatives prioritized the needs and discussed possible solutions.

FRUITS OF COOPERATIVE LABOR: THE URBAN CURRICULUM PARTNERSHIP

As a result of these meetings, a partnership between the University, School District, and community emerged. The university agreed to act as a liaison between the community and school district and help develop and implement programs. The goal was to help "At Risk" students reach their academic potential, stay in school and eventually enter into a postsecondary education program. In order to reach the largest number of students on a timely basis, a district-wide tutoring program was developed and implemented in conjunction with the already existing academic program in the schools. (see figure 1)

(Benefits to School District)

Part time teachers were acting as tutors in the intermediate, junior high and senior high in a district's previous program. The vocational high school operated with three tutors who worked under a drop out prevention program. The ratio of tutors per students varied from 1-5 to 1-15 depending on time of day and building. University students were added to school-based tutoring sites to help alleviate the overload of students being tutored at one time. All of the university students receive one academic credit for their participation.

University students were placed in the schools during the day to work with a tutor/coordinator. Primary and secondary students were identified

BENEFITS DERIVED BY PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPANTS

(figure 1)

School District	Community	University
-Specific objectives and curriculum developed for "at risk" students	-A homework/ tutoring program established for students, operated by parents/ community members	-Provided an early field experience for preservice teachers
-Full time tutor coordinators (through outside funding) to supervise university students and coordinate the tutoring program	-Motivational speaker, role models provided for minority community	-Provided a multi-cultural experience for preservice teachers
-Access to university faculty to provide technical assistance for training tutor coordinators, conducting workshops and evaluating overall program effectiveness	-Opportunity for parents/community members to meet and express concerns with teacher and administrators	-A larger pool of minority students will be eligible to enter the teacher education program

for tutoring on the basis of a standardized reading score, report card grades, and a below average performance on the Pennsylvania TELLS (Testing for Essential Literacy & Learning Skills) test. Attitude surveys were also administered to each student. University students are paired with individual students and meet with the student twice a week for a minimum 1 hour per visit.

(Benefit to the Community)

Parents and community volunteers were trained to tutor students in an evening tutoring program held twice a week. The evening program is designed to provide additional help to students who needed it. The evening program has a second objective: it is to involve minority parents in their children's education. At the center, students are helped with their homework and also have access to a computer lab. The parents and community volunteers who participate describe their experience as both positive and rewarding. For many, it is the first time that they felt useful in any way to anyone. In addition to tutoring, the center also provides cultural experiences for minority students. Affective needs of students are often overlooked in the education process. Minority students must experience exposure to positive role-models, art, music and other cultural events in order to know what they can achieve. Many of these minority students have never left the confines of their neighborhood. They have no frame of reference or motivation to strive to broaden and improve their standard of living and goals. Professional minority speakers are brought in to instill the value of education and field trips are planned to get the students out of their environment to experience an alternative lifestyle.

(Benefits to the University)

The university students are all teacher education majors. The university benefits by having a field site that provides a valuable multicultural experience for the mostly white teacher education students. By increasing the number of minority students who enter postsecondary education programs, the university can increase the number of minority students who will meet requirements for acceptance into the Teacher Education Program.

(Problems Encountered: Project Director's Perspective)

Many problems are encountered when venturing into the world of partnerships. There are many people with diverse agendas in any partnership. Often partnerships between universities and schools fall after the initial euphoria. A project director finds himself/herself working with individuals from three different environments whose ideas, personalities, values and even styles of communication are quite different. The politics and bureaucracy of each institution has to be acknowledged and one must learn to recognize and work with people who know the system and know how to manipulate it. Listening is an important asset and flexibility is a must. There are circumstances which can not be controlled that effect the program and have to be addressed (eg. union opposition, massive teacher lay-off, that causes changes in teacher placement). The following issues posed the greatest challenge for the project director of this partnership:

1. Lack of adequate communication and contact with university students due to schedules of students and project director.
2. New ways to communicate with and involve more minority parents.

3. Ways to recruit and retain more volunteer parent/community tutors.
4. Ways to help community groups realize that a collaboration/partnership means working together, not one group "being in charge".
5. How to keep the lines of communication open between university, school and community. Trouble shooting potential problem.
6. Transportation for university students to school sites.
7. How to manage the tremendous amount of time and energy needed to work with all the groups involved in the partnership.
8. Time and resources to collect and analyze the large amount of data being collected.
9. How to deal with negative attitude of some university faculty about reaching outside of university into communities.
10. Funding, its an ongoing concern.

A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE MODEL

There is no one model of a collaboration between higher education, public schools and communities. Models must be tailored for individual circumstances or conditions involved in the partnership. A wide range of practices evolve from each particular situation. Collaborations depend primarily on the voluntary efforts of the participants to improve their schools through teamwork. There are however, some practical guidelines for partners that may be helpful to use in reconceptualizing educational systems (Jones & Maloy, 1988). Interactive/shared partnerships involve continual bargaining. Organizational leaders have to emphasize mutual

benefits for participants while hoping that interactive processes will indirectly serve larger institutional purposes and institutional linkages will be strengthened.

Although each collaboration will be unique depending on the participants and physical settings, there are some things that can facilitate the initiation of the partnership and implementation of subsequent programs. The following diagram (see figure 2) is a model used for the Urban Curriculum Partnership. It can serve as a model for other universities who wish to form a partnership with a school(s) or a school district.

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